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SUBJECT: AMBASSADOR'S SEPTEMBER 21 MEETING WITH PRESIDENT URIBE

Classified By: Ambassador William R. Brownfield

Reasons: 1.4 (b) and (d)

SUMMARY

¶1. (C) The Ambassador briefed President Uribe on the latest developments on the bilateral Free Trade Agreement (FTA), urged the GOC to coordinate closely with the USG on the efforts of Senator Cordoba and President Chavez to achieve a humanitarian exchange with the FARC, and outlined likely shifts in U.S. assistance from traditional counter narcotics activities to nationalization, manual eradication, justice, and vulnerable communities. Uribe said he would invite House Speaker Nancy Pelosi and other members of Congress to visit Colombia prior to a vote on the FTA, and agreed on the need to handle Cordoba and Chavez with care. He welcomed likely changes in U.S. aid, urging greater support for his & forest families8 program, and urged the USG to help publicize recent increases in cocaine prices in the United States. Uribe reiterated his commitment to extradite former paramilitary leader Macaco as soon as the USG formally requests it, but said he needs more evidence to justify the extradition of Don Berna. End Summary

¶2. (SBU) The Ambassador met September 21 with President Uribe, Vice Foreign Minister Adriana Mejia, GOC Peace Commissioner Luis Carlos Restrepo, and Foreign Ministry Office Director for the United States and Canada Patricia Cortes. Polcouns participated as notetaker.

FREE TRADE AGREEMENT

¶3. (SBU) The Ambassador reviewed the latest developments on the FTA. President Uribe said during his September 24-28 visit to New York for the UN General Assembly meetings, he would publicly invite House Speaker Nancy Pelosi and other members of Congress to visit Colombia prior to a congressional vote on the FTA. He would also meet with World Bank President Robert Zoellick and former President Clinton, and would discuss the FTA issue with them as well.

HUMANITARIAN ACCORD WITH FARC

¶4. (C) The Ambassador said that the USG welcomes any

initiative*whether a rescue operation or a voluntary release*that leads to the freedom of the hostages, but noted our global policy precludes the USG from making concessions to kidnappers. We publicly support the efforts of Senator Cordoba and President Chavez to negotiate a humanitarian exchange with the FARC, but also recognize that the two do not necessarily have an interest in maintaining strong U.S.-Colombian relations. The GOC and USG need to work closely on this sensitive issue.

¶ 15. (C) President Uribe agreed that the GOC and USG need to handle Chavez and Cordoba with care. He had authorized the two to act as facilitators because he faced great pressure from the families of the hostages, as well as from various domestic political interests, and could not appear insensitive. Uribe conceded Chavez, and Cordoba's involvement poses risks, but said he would accept the risk as long as they respected his four &immovable⁸ conditions. These are: 1) no demilitarized zone or &despeje,⁸ 2) no FARC meetings with international political figures inside Colombia, 3) equal treatment for U.S. and Colombian hostages, and 4) no return of FARC prisoners to FARC ranks. Uribe instructed GOC Peace Commissioner Luis Carlos Restrepo to coordinate with the USG to avoid any misunderstandings as the process unfolds.

¶ 16. (C) Ambassador noted that we have some bottom lines as well. 1) We will not negotiate with or make concessions to kidnappers. 2) We leave all options on the table to resolve the situation. 3) We welcome the efforts of anyone to contribute to the prompt and safe return of the hostages to their families.

¶ 17. (C) Uribe said that Chavez consistently tests the limits set by the four conditions. During their August 31 meeting in Bogota, Uribe said Chavez told him that the extradition of &Sonia⁸ and &Simon Trinidad⁸ to the United States complicates the inclusion of the U.S. hostages in a humanitarian exchange. Chavez also said he would ask French President Sarkozy to raise Sonia's and Simon's return with President Bush. Uribe said he reiterated to Chavez the GOC's position on equal treatment, and told him that the GOC would not raise the issue of &Simon⁸ and &Sonia⁸ with the USG.

¶ 18. (C) Uribe explained to the Ambassador that Simon's and Sonia's return to Colombia would undercut his extradition policy, noting the GOC had extradited a third FARC member to the United States the day before. He said the GOC has not renounced its efforts to achieve a military rescue, and stressed that continued military pressure*with U.S. help*on the FARC Secretariat is key to achieving an eventual peace accord. Uribe added that the GOC would not attempt to rescue the U.S. hostages without coordinating beforehand with the USG.

PLAN COLOMBIA

¶ 19. (C) The Ambassador said that the U.S. Congress is working to reconcile conflicting versions of our foreign assistance package to Colombia. Both would maintain a substantial assistance package, but would boost spending on manual eradication, the Prosecutor General's Office, and vulnerable communities, such as indigenous, Afro-Colombians and internally displaced persons, at the likely expense of traditional security and counter narcotics programs. The U.S. Congress also wants greater progress on nationalization. We were willing to work with the GOC, but nationalization was inevitable. We could manage it ourselves, or let the Congress impose it. General McCaffrey's upcoming visit would provide an opportunity to review these issues in greater detail.

¶ 110. (C) Uribe said he understood the need for change, and agreed on the importance of more funding for manual eradication, the Fiscalia, and vulnerable communities. He

committed to instructing Defense Minister Santos to work closely with the Ambassador on nationalization, and asked the USG to consider boosting funding for his & forest families⁸ (guardabosques) program. This program creates legitimate employment for peasant families in areas where commercial crops, such as African Palm and cacao, are not viable. Uribe stressed the value of continued efforts to unify USG and UN measurements of coca cultivation in Colombia, and urged the USG to highlight recent increases in cocaine prices and declines in purity in the United States. The USG should also help publicize recent GOC successes in capturing and extraditing major narcotraffickers such as Don Diego Montoya and Luis Hernandez Gomez Bustamante (Rasguno).

EXTRADITION OF MACACO AND DON BERNAL

¶11. (C) Uribe said the GOC possesses clear evidence of Macaco's continued involvement in criminal activities after joining the paramilitary peace process, and reiterated his commitment to extradite him as soon as the USG presents its request. Macaco was the successor to Pablo Escobar and his extradition would deal a major blow to narcotrafficking in Colombia. In contrast, Uribe said the GOC lacks & solid⁸ proof of continued criminal activity by Don Berna. Moreover, reports from the Mayor's Office in Medellin indicate Berna is complying in good faith with his peace process obligations. Uribe said he would extradite Berna if the evidence warrants it, but the GOC does not have such proof at this time.

Brownfield